

POE IN THE CAPITAL

WHEN THE POET OF WOE SOUGHT
A GOVERNMENT POSITION.The Pathos and Earnestness of His
Quest, His Miserable Destitution
and His Futile Chase of the Public
Service Will-o'-the-Wisp.

Edgar Allan Poe, the master singer of sorrow, the world famous author of "The Raven," not only lived in Washington a number of weeks, but came near becoming a government clerk and residing in the national capital permanently, says Elizabeth Elliott Poe in the Washington Post.

Destiny prevented Poe from obtaining a government post, however. Burns got into the excise, Charles Lamb had a desk in the Indian house, writing his masterly essays "after hours." Hawthorne enjoyed a snug berth in the consular service, but there was no easy government billet for Edgar Allan Poe. The suggestion that there might be one came from Frederick William Thomas, a literary friend of the poet, himself an excellent writer under President Tyler.

Deeply impressed with the light duties of government service. The year was 1841, and in the Poe calendar this was the year when the Poe dream child, a Poe magazine, was near birth. The idea itself was born without ways and means to protect it from the world or keep it in the world. The personal exchequer was low and editors dilatory with payments. Where was the money to come from for even the initial number? The prospect of steady, light remuneration came at the psychological moment. The bubble of hope grew, beautiful with rainbow hues, lived a moment, then, like other Poe bubbles, burst and disappeared.

The story of its brief hour can be best told in extracts from the correspondence between Poe and Thomas. On March 7, 1841, Thomas wrote a chatty note to Poe on Washington affairs generally and his own literary ambitions particularly and spoke of a book he was working on.

"How would you like," he asked, "to be an officeholder here at \$150 monthly, payable by Uncle Sam, who, slack as he may be to his general creditors, pays his officeholders with due punctuality? How would you like it?" Then Thomas touched up the picture with a humorous description of the sinecure post a government clerk held in those days. "The work is by no means hard. You stroll to the office a little after 9, take your own leisure through the day and then stroll home after 2 to dinner and do not return till 6. If after dinner you have anything to do, it is an agreeable relaxation from the monstrous laziness of the day. You have everything in the writing line on your desk, and if you choose to lubricate in the literary way, why, you can. You can follow literature as well here as where you are, and think of the money to be made by it."

Poe, in his miserable destitution, seized on this straw of hope with avidity. To be released from pecuniary care, to serve his beloved art in peace—what a haven it promised! Besides Thomas' persuasions there were other reasons why the scheme seemed possible. As an adopted son of Virginia, a personal acquaintance of President Tyler and the literary protégé of Postmaster General John P. Kennedy his chances appeared great. In addition to these he was a descendant of men who had fought in the Revolution and again in the war of 1812, and his own grandfather, General David Poe, gave his entire fortune to the cause of liberty, and surely that should have given the genuine grandson a claim to the favors of the state.

Eagerly he penned his reply. Very characteristic it was, too, of the man. Pathetic in the betrayal of the present sufferings, of which pride would not allow full revelation—how the pertinent, earnest words hold a power to dim the eyes that read them today!

"Would to God," he writes, "I could do as you have done. Do you seriously think an application to Tyler would have a good result? My claims, to be sure, are very few. I am a Virginian—at least I call myself one—for I have resided all the years of my life except the last few in Richmond. My political principles have always been as nearly as may be with the existing administration, and I battled with right good will for Harrison when opportunity offered. With Mr. Tyler I have personal acquaintance, although this he may have forgotten. For the rest, I am a literary man, and see a disposition in the government to cherish letters. Have I any chance?"

The earnestness of this reply evidently frightened Thomas. To him without doubt it was an idle suggestion, inspired somewhat by sympathy for Poe and gratitude for literary aid given him. The next letter shows the change of tone. It is cautious and noncommittal, diplomatic and intriguing. In this pretty phrase he begins:

"I trust, my dear friend, you can obtain an appointment. President Tyler I have not seen, although I called to see his sons, but they were not in. Couldn't you slip on yourself and see the president? But perhaps your application had better be made through some one who has influence with the executive. I have heard you say John P. Kennedy had regard for you and will be glad to serve you. Would he not?"

This letter chilled the poet's hopes. Still he does not give up the idea, for is not John P. Kennedy one of the few true friends fate has given him? It will be remembered that it was Kennedy who had obtained for him the post of editor of the Southern Literary Messenger and who helped him with money and advice through many a dark hour. All the advantages of a personal visit presented themselves.

But where was the money? After futile attempts to raise it he writes sadly to Thomas:

"Would to God I could come to Washington, but you know the old story—I have no money; not enough to take me there, to say nothing of getting back. It is a hard thing to be poor, but as I am kept so by an honest motive I dare not complain. Mr. Kennedy has at all times been a true friend to me. He was the first true friend I ever had. He will be willing to help me, I know, but needs urging, for he is always head over heels in business. Thomas, may I depend on you?"

From here the story moves swiftly. Little or nothing was done by Thomas for his friend, who, beyond speaking to Robert Tyler, son of the president, did little for Poe. Bob Tyler, himself a literary dilettante, endeavored to secure Poe a position in the Philadelphia custom house, but his "pull" was not elastic enough. The custom house officials promptly resented his interference and flatly turned his candidate down. A cabinet crisis, the principal event of the Tyler regime, was approaching, and Bob knew it was of little use to try to interest his father in poetry or prose.

Still, Thomas, by half satisfactory letters, kept the hope alive for a year. He must have known how frail the promises were, but the poet believed in them and him. His anxiety for the post was heightened by first signs of consumption in Virginia, his beautiful child wife, and it meant delicacies and probably her life. Poe was not idle while he waited, however. With the will-o'-the-wisp of government service dazzling his eyes he still dug away at the grub worms beneath his feet. The magazine scheme had grown into tangible shape, and promised support made the future sanguine. It was as much in the hope of obtaining support from President Tyler and his cabinet as getting the long desired clerkship that Poe came to Washington in 1843, leaving Virginia and Mrs. Clemm in Philadelphia.

Arriving in Washington, the poet was given a royal welcome by Thomas and friends. Board had been engaged for him at the Widow Barrett's, in New York avenue, near Thirteenth and H streets, N. W. Thomas and Bob Tyler dined with each other in showing the visitor the sights of Washington, but here their interest ended. Tyler read Poe's poems, and Poe read his and highly praised them, which greatly pleased the play poet.

Bees Like Light Clothes.

"There's one thing you want to remember if you go into the bee culture business," remarked the man who had just torn a hive to pieces to demonstrate how easy it was to handle bees, "and that is never to approach the bees when dressed in dark clothes. Bees have a decided aversion to dark habiliments, and they show their repugnance in a lively fashion. Wear white duck and you'll meet their approval. I never think of fussing with my hives so long as I'm wearing a dark suit, and my wife, to whom the bees are not accustomed, never has the least trouble in approaching the hives if she is wearing a white gown. A bee bears a grudge about as long as an Indian will. He makes no allowances for mistakes or an accident. Once you harm him he will have it in for you for the rest of his life. Bees are not naturally bad tempered, and they are really timid by nature, but if you carelessly crush them they will show an anger out of all proportion to their size and will sometimes sting you until they themselves drop dead."

Politicians' and Other Bibles.

"You bibliophiles talk about the 'breeches' Bible, the 'bug' Bible, the 'politician' Bible, the 'vinegar' Bible, and so on. What do those names mean?"

"I'll tell you," the collector answered. "Take first the 'breeches' Bible. It is so called because a typographical error in it causes the garments made by Adam and Eve out of fig leaves to be termed breeches instead of aprons."

"In the 'vinegar' Bible of 1807 the word 'vineyard' is misprinted 'vinegar.'"

"The 'printers' Bible, 1702, makes the psalmist say, 'Printers have persecuted me without a cause.'"

"The 'religious' Bible, which was printed in 1687, put 'religious' for 'rebellious' in the fourth chapter, seventeenth verse of Jeremiah—'Because she hath been religious . . . saith the Lord.'"

"The 'politician' Bible was published at Geneva in 1652. It makes the famous verse, 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' read 'Blessed are the placemakers.'"

Bananas as They Grow.

When you are buying bananas never purchase the long thin ones unless you want fruit which will pucker your mouth. No matter how well ripened these thin bananas are, they will always be found both sour and arid. That is because the bunch containing them was picked too soon. The banana grows fastest at first in length. When it has reached its fullest development in that direction it suddenly begins to swell and in a few days will double its girth. It is at the end of this time that the banana is ripened naturally, and the effort of the banana importer is to have the fruit picked at the last moment and yet before the ripening has progressed even enough to tinge the bright green of the fruit with yellow. A difference of twenty-four hours on the trees at this time will make a difference in the weight of the fruit, perhaps 25 per cent, and all the difference in its final flavor between a puccery sour and the sweetness and smoothness which are characteristic of the ripe fruit.

Verdict for Dr. Pierce

AGAINST THE
Ladies' Home Journal.

Sending truth after a lie. It is an old maxim that "a lie will travel seven leagues while truth is getting its boots on," and no doubt hundreds of thousands of good people read the unwarranted and malicious attack upon Dr. R. V. Pierce and his "Favorite Prescription" published in the May (1904) number of the Ladies' Home Journal, with its great black display headings, who never saw the humble, groveling retraction, with its inconspicuous heading, published two months later. It was boldly charged in the slanderous and libelous article that Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, for the cure of woman's weaknesses and ailments, contained alcohol and other harmful ingredients. Dr. Pierce promptly brought suit against the publishers of the Ladies' Home Journal, for \$200,000.00 damages.

Dr. Pierce alleged that Mr. Bok, the editor, maliciously published the article containing such false and defamatory matter with the intent of injuring his business, and that he had used other "curious, or habit-forming, drugs are, or ever were, contained in his 'Favorite Prescription'; that said medicine is made from native medicinal roots and contains no harmful ingredients whatsoever; that Mr. Bok's malicious statements were wholly and absolutely false."

In the retraction printed by said Journal they were forced to acknowledge that they had published and used the "Favorite Prescription" from eminent chemists, all of whom certified that it did not contain alcohol, and that the alleged harmful ingredients were also proven to be harmless by the action in the Supreme Court. But the business of Dr. Pierce was greatly injured by the publication of the libelous article with its great display headings, while hundreds of thousands who read the defamatory article never saw the humble groveling retraction set in small type and made as inconspicuous as possible. The matter was, however, brought before a jury in the Supreme Court of New York State which promptly rendered a verdict in the doctor's favor. Thus his traducers came to grief and their base slanders were refuted.

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